The State Government has set up a Punjab State Farmers' Commission to find ways and means to rejuvenate Punjab's economy. It will also look into the issue of suicide by farmers in the State, its causes and will suggest remedial measures including rehabilitation and compensation to the affected persons/ families, etc.

Increasing soil fertility in drought-prone areas

2907. SHRI THANGA TAMIL SELVAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that frequent droughts in a region adversely affects the fertility of the soil, eventually affecting productivity;

(b) the steps taken by Government to improve soil fertility in such regions; and

(c) whether Government would consider launching a special scheme for the drought-prone districts of Madurai, Theni, Dindigul, Ramanathapuram, Thirunelveli, etc. in Tamil Nadu?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) In general, the occurrence of drought does not have significant effect on diminishing soil fertility in short run. However frequent drought in a region can have adverse effect on soil fertility by way of (i) reduced bio-mass production (ii) fast decomposing of soil organic matter (iii) poor bio-activity in the Rhizospher and (iv) deterioration of soil structure and water holding capacity.

(b) The Central Research Institute for Dry Land Agriculture (CRIDA), Hyderabad and its network of 25 All India Coordinated Research Project on Dry Land Agriculture (AICRPDA) Centres Provide Technical Support to the State Governments by way of training, exposure visits on managing soil fertility during drought through various technologies in different agro ecological regions.

(c) No such proposal has been received from the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Rate of interest on farmers loans

2908. SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Will the Minsiter of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether M.S. Swaminathan Farmers Commission recommended

that the rate of interest on farmers loan may be reduced to 4 per cent simple interest and should not be compounded on arrears;

(b) if so, whether Government have taken any decision on this;

(c) if not, reasons therefor; and

(d) if so, when it will be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The Government have decided to allow the farmers to secure, effective from kharif 2006-07, short-term credit at 7% with an upper limit of Rs.3,00,000 on the principal amount.

Special package for relief to farmers

†2909. SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:
DR. MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government propose to give a special package to provide relief to the farmers;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) the outlines of the proposals under consideration for special-package scheme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTI LAL BHURIA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Government is drawing up a package for the districts worst affected by the incidence of suicide by farmers. The package would address their credit, insurance, irrigation and subsidiary income needs, through dairy, poultry and horticulture.

Agriculture production in Andhra Pradesh

2910. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state

(a) whether it is a fact that the production of some of the agricultural products in Andhra Pradesh during the last five years has come down

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.